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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5016  
INFO RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 3662  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0033  
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 0001  
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 0014  
RUEHPT/AMCONSUL PERTH 1626  
RUEHDN/AMCONSUL SYDNEY 2145

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MELBOURNE 000119

NOFORN  
SIPDIS

STATE FOR INR  
STATE PLEASE PASS TO DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/12/2019  
TAGS: [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [AS](#)  
SUBJECT: AUSTRALIAN VA MINISTER TO MEET U.S. COUNTERPART

REF: MELBOURNE 52

Classified By: JUSTIN KOLBECK, POL/ECON OFFICER FOR REASON 1.4(B)

Summary

1. (SBU) Alan Griffin, Australia's Minister for Veterans' Affairs, informed us that he is planning to meet U.S. Secretary for Veterans' Affairs Shinseki in New Zealand in February 2010 along with the VA ministers from the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Canada. We provide bio notes on this left-leaning member of the Australian Labor Party (ALP).  
End Summary.

Five Eyes VA Meeting

2. (SBU) Griffin informed Consul General on November 6 that he plans to meet U.S. Secretary of Veterans' Affairs Shinseki in New Zealand in February 2010 along with the VA ministers from the United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand, hoping to learn from "shared challenges" such as dealing with traumatic brain injury. Griffin said he had met former VA Secretary Peake in late 2008 and that he still holds Peake in very high regard.

Bio Notes - Alan Griffin

3. (SBU) Born February 23, 1960, Alan Peter Griffin hails from Melbourne and has served in the Australian House of Representatives since March 1993. Kevin Rudd appointed him Minister for Veterans Affairs (VA) following the November 2007 election. Prior to that, Griffin filled the minor opposition roles of Shadow Minister for Consumer Affairs and Shadow Minister Assisting the Shadow Minister for Health from 2003 to 2005. In June 2005, he was appointed Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Shadow Special Minister of State.

4. (SBU) Like most ALP parliamentarians, Griffin has a strong union affiliation, serving as an official for the Federated Clerk's Union (now part of the Australian Services Union). Griffin was a member of the Springvale City Council from 1991-1993 while working as a staffer for former federal minister Simon Crean. Griffin is part of the Victorian Socialist Left faction led by Kim Carr, Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research. He played a leading role in mending a divide that erupted in early 2009 within Victoria's state ALP branch. Griffin also backed Prime Minister Rudd's campaign to replace Kim Beazley (incoming Australian Ambassador to Washington) as ALP leader.

## Ministerial Style

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15. (C/NF) Griffin is a conscientious politician. In describing his Veterans' Affairs portfolio during a November 6 meeting with Consul General, he outlined campaign promises yet to be implemented, saying he needs to make progress on them before they became "embarrassing issues" in the next federal election (likely to be held August-November 2010). Griffin's electorate of Bruce is an ethnically diverse area, including a large number of Tamils, with a wide range of commercial activities including warehousing and light engineering.

16. (C/NF) In light of the current asylum seeker challenge in Australia, which he believes will not be an election issue for the Rudd government, Griffin relayed a story about the funeral of one of his long-time friends of Tamil extraction. Griffin was asked to speak at the funeral and only noticed when he approached the coffin that it was draped in the Tamil Tiger flag. He quickly modified his televised speech, acknowledging that he and his friend had a long-term friendship, but "often disagreed." Griffin also noted the disturbing possibility of Tamil Tiger members being among Tamil asylum seekers destined for Australia.

Comment

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17. (C/NF) Griffin is a dynamic interlocutor with a profound

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grasp of Australian politics and a street reputation for being a ladies' man. He views his duties as a minister through the prism of the election cycle and its impact upon his career, yet he seems content with his current portfolio. Griffin will likely continue to do the hard yards within the ranks of the ALP and may obtain a more senior cabinet post in the next five years. Along with Senator Kim Carr, Griffin is a counterweight in the Victorian ALP to Stephen Conroy (reftel) and Bill Shorten in the ALP right, though Griffin emphasized that factions are becoming less important in Australian politics.

THURSTON